



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge South San Diego Bay Unit, San Diego NWR *June 2000 – Planning Update (Vol. 1)*

### Comprehensive Conservation Planning to Begin for South Bay Refuges

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pleased to announce the initiation of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) process for the South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Sweetwater Marsh NWR. The purpose of this planning effort is to develop a CCP that will provide these refuge areas with a 15-year management plan for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their related habitats, while also providing opportunities for compatible wildlife dependent recreation.

The CCP will cover the 3,500-acre South San Diego Bay Unit and the 316-acre Sweetwater Marsh NWR. Although the two refuge areas are not contiguous, their relationship to one another physically and biologically supports the proposal to include the two refuges under one management plan. Preserved within these two refuges are most of what remains of San Diego Bay's historic salt marsh and intertidal mudflat areas. In addition, both refuge areas support habitat for similar endangered and threatened species including the California Least Tern, Western Snowy Plover, and Light-footed Clapper Rail. Designated by the American Bird Conservancy as an Important Bird Area of global significance, the south end of San Diego Bay also provides significant habitat for a wide variety of migratory shorebirds and wintering sea ducks.

In addition to providing a clear statement of the desired future conditions for these refuges, the CCP process is also intended to ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions. The views of individuals, the local community (including landowners and local businesses), public agencies, and interested organizations will play an important role in the CCP process. Over the next few years, you will be receiving periodic planning updates



South San Diego Bay

that will inform you of our progress and provide information explaining how you can be involved in the various phases of plan development – from participating in public workshops to submitting written comments. Public involvement is an essential component of this planning effort, and we encourage your participation throughout the process.

### Upcoming Public Workshops *Please Join Us*

To initiate the public participation process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will host two open houses in July. Come and share your visions for the South San Diego Bay Unit and Sweetwater Marsh NWR and tell us how you think they can best be achieved. To accommodate as many people as possible, we have scheduled a daytime and an evening workshop. We hope you can attend one of these. If you are unable to attend, we encourage you to write, e-mail, fax or phone in your comments to the address provided on the back page.

### Public Meetings

*Join us at one of the  
following Open Houses*

#### **MONDAY, JULY 10**

7:00 – 9:00 PM

Marina Vista Center  
1075 8th Street  
Imperial Beach, CA  
(located just off Imperial  
Beach Blvd. – behind the  
Imperial Beach Library)

#### **TUESDAY, JULY 11**

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Chula Vista Nature Center  
Auditorium  
1000 Gunpowder Pt. Dr.  
Chula Vista, CA  
(Please arrive at the Nature  
Center parking lot, located off  
E Street and I-5, between 1:00  
and 1:15 PM to catch the shut-  
tle to the Nature Center)

Both facilities and the shuttle  
are fully accessible.

For additional information call  
619-691-1185.

## **National Wildlife Refuge System: *Preserving wildlife and habitat for people today, and for generations to come.***

### **What is a National Wildlife Refuge?**

A National Wildlife Refuge is a designated area of land or water that has been set aside for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. Rachel Carson described a refuge as land that “has been dedicated by the American people to preserving, for themselves and their children, as much of our native wildlife as can be retained along with our modern civilization.”

### **Tentative Planning Schedule**

#### **July 2000**

Open houses to identify issues and opportunities

#### **August/Sept. 2000**

Continue to identify issues through meetings with agencies and the public

#### **Oct./Nov. 2000**

Define issues; establish goals and objectives; develop alternatives

#### **January 2001**

Public workshop to discuss alternatives

#### **October 2001**

Draft Plan/NEPA  
Document released for public comment

#### **November 2001**

Public Meetings on Draft Plan/NEPA Document

#### **March 2002**

Begin implementing CCP

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the only national network of public lands set aside specifically for the protection and conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. Born in 1903 as a result of President Theodore Roosevelt's order to protect a small island in Florida as a “preserve and breeding grounds for native birds,” the National Wildlife Refuge System now includes more than 500 refuges. Today, over 93 million acres of land and water provide important habitat for nearly 260 threatened or endangered species and hundreds of other fish, wildlife, insect and plant species.

More than 30 million Americans visit national wildlife refuges each year. While the needs of wildlife must come first, many refuges welcome those who want to enjoy the natural world: to observe or photograph wildlife, to hunt or fish, or to learn about wildlife and their needs.

### **Why is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan being prepared?**

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires that a CCP be prepared for each refuge in the System. Both the Service and the public will benefit from this requirement, as the CCP process provides many opportunities for ensuring that the long-term vision and goals for these refuges will be evaluated, developed, and achieved.

Our goal is to prepare a CCP that:

- Provides a clear vision of the desired future conditions for each refuge area;
- Establishes refuge management priorities for the next 15 years that are consistent with achieving the desired future conditions;
- Ensures that management decisions will fulfill the mission of the NWR System, as well as the specific purposes for which the refuge areas were established;
- Thoroughly evaluates the full range of views and comments provided by those individuals, groups and agencies that participated in the planning process;
- Incorporates an ecosystem approach into the management strategies for habitat protection, enhancement, and restoration; and
- Identifies which public uses are, and are not, compatible with the vision and goals that are established for these refuge areas through the CCP process.

*“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”*

*-National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997*

## South San Diego Bay – Teeming With Life



The South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego NWR was established in January 1999. The Unit's approved acquisition boundaries encompass about 3,500 acres of land and water in and around the southern end of San Diego Bay. An additional 440 acres of Navy-owned land, located between the bay and Pacific Ocean, were approved as a Stewardship Project. Both areas are part of the larger San Diego NWR.

The South San Diego Bay Unit supports tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds, nesting seabirds, wintering sea ducks and other migratory waterfowl. Native habitats include open bay, intertidal mudflats, salt marsh, eelgrass beds, and southern willow scrub. The western terminus of the Otay River is also included in the Unit boundaries and provides riparian and salt marsh habitats that support a population of Light-footed Clapper Rails. Approximately 146 acres of restorable fallow agricultural land occur at the eastern end of this refuge unit.

Also included within the South San Diego Bay Unit is a salt production operation that maintains about 1,050 acres of salt ponds. These artificially diked ponds and adjacent salt marsh and intertidal habitats provide an abundance of fish, brine shrimp, and brine flies. These areas are particularly important to shorebirds and seabirds, because they are one of the few large feeding, resting, and nesting areas remaining along the California coast. The artificial dikes provide nesting habitat for Western Snowy Plover and colonies of Caspian, Forster's, Gull-billed, Royal and California Least Terns. This area also supports one of only two nesting colonies of Elegant Terns in the United States, and is one of three primary locations in California where Black Skimmers nest.

Interim goals were developed for the San Diego NWR in 1997 and will be reviewed as part of the planning process to determine whether they are still appropriate or if they should be updated for the South San Diego Bay Unit. Interim goals include:

Protect, restore, and enhance native habitats to aid in the recovery of federally endangered and threatened species and to prevent the listing of additional species.

Protect, manage, and restore the rare coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland, vernal pools, coastal dune and wetland habitats representative of the biodiversity of the southwestern San Diego region.

Create partnerships and provide leadership in coordinating the land management activities of federal, tribal, state, and local governments and agencies, and with academia, private conservation organizations and citizens in support of the Multiple Species Conservation Program preserve system.

Provide breeding, migration, and wintering habitat for migratory birds, with emphasis on seabird and shorebird breeding habitat and wintering waterfowl habitat.

Provide safe and high quality opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent educational and recreational activities that foster public appreciation of the unique natural heritage of the San Diego region.

### How You Can Help

- ◇ You can help us the most by getting involved. Give us your thoughts and ideas regarding these refuge areas.
- ◇ Help us identify potential issues related to refuge management, wildlife-dependent recreational uses, habitat protection, and more.
- ◇ You can also assist us in exploring what opportunities or alternatives might be available to resolve potential issues.
- ◇ Join us at upcoming public meetings and workshops; your thoughts will stimulate new ideas in other participants.
- ◇ You can also provide input by writing, calling or e-mailing us (contact information is provided on the back page).
- ◇ Finally, your assistance is needed to get the word out about this process. Suggest to your friends and colleagues that they too get involved.

**You are an important part of the process; please join us.**



Terns at South Bay ©Peter Knapp

## Sweetwater Marsh NWR – Preserving Salt Marsh and Coastal Uplands



Salt Marsh Bird's Beak  
© Phillip Roullard

*A rare salt marsh plant, Palmer's Frankenia, can also be found at Sweetwater Marsh. In recent years, the Chula Vista Nature Center has been able to propagate this rare plant.*

The Sweetwater Marsh NWR was established in 1988 to conserve and protect endangered and threatened fish, wildlife, and plant species. The refuge's 316 acres, which are located on the east side of San Diego Bay, include tidal marsh and adjacent coastal upland habitat. The marsh provides habitat for two federally endangered bird species, the California Least Tern and Light-footed Clapper Rail, one threatened species of bird (Western Snowy Plover), and one endangered plant species (Salt Marsh Bird's Beak). The refuge also provides habitat for a variety of migrating shorebirds and wintering waterfowl. Over 200 species of birds have been recorded at the Sweetwater Marsh NWR.

The Sweetwater Marsh NWR functions as an essential link between Multiple Species Conservation Program wildlands, the South San Diego Bay Unit, and the Tijuana Slough NWR in Imperial Beach. Located within the refuge is the Chula Vista Nature Center, which is operated by the City of Chula Vista. The Nature Center has museum designation and offers visitors opportunities for education, wildlife interpretation, and viewing. A system of hiking and observation trails is also provided for wildlife viewing and interpretation. The refuge and interpretive center host approximately 48,000 visitors each year. The Nature Center's education programs annually reaches over 3,000 students in the South Bay in a formal classroom and field-study environment.

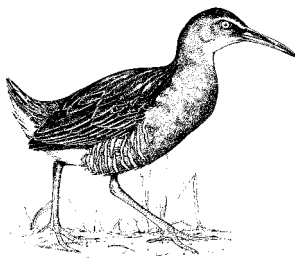
Interim goals for the Sweetwater Marsh NWR were developed in 1997. These goals, which are outlined below, will be reviewed as part of the planning process to determine whether they are still appropriate.

Preserve, restore, enhance, and aid in the recovery of native species in their native habitats threatened with extinction, with emphasis on the Light-footed Clapper Rail, the California Least Tern, the Western Snowy Plover, and Salt Marsh Bird's Beak.

Protect, enhance, and restore the wetland habitats of the Sweetwater River marshes, the last emergent wetland on San Diego Bay, as habitat for migratory birds.

Restore the former industrial and agricultural uplands of the refuge to support representative populations of native plants and animals.

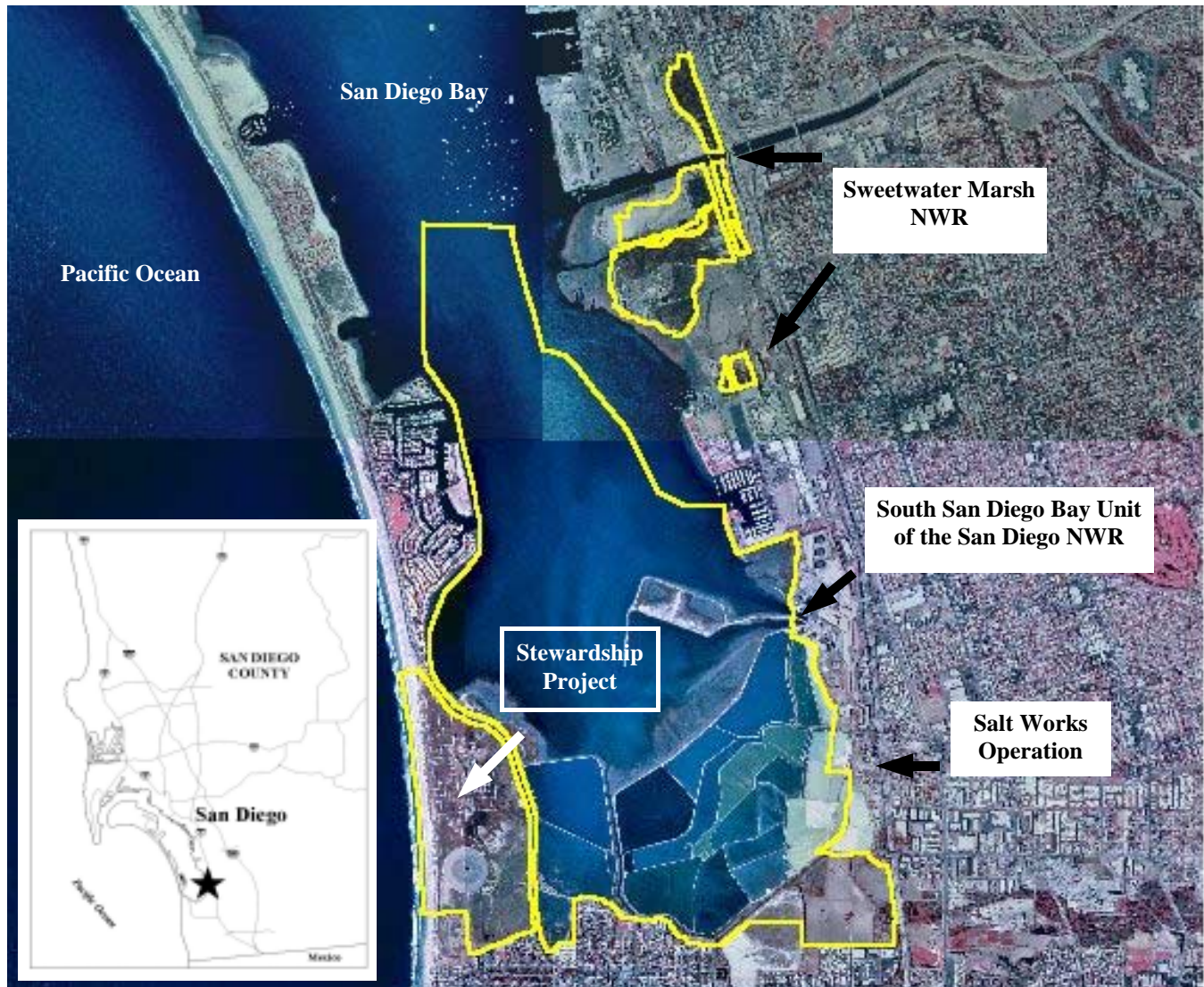
Work with the City of Chula Vista and the Bayfront Conservancy Trust in the operation of the Chula Vista Nature Center and to provide outstanding environmental education and interpretive programs.



Light-footed Clapper Rail  
© Shari Erickson



## Location of the South San Diego Bay Unit and Sweetwater Marsh NWR



## Preliminary Issues and Opportunities

Protection and Habitat Enhancement for Endangered Species - - Invasive Species - - Restoration Potential  
Boating - - Historic/Cultural Resources - - Edge Effects - - Public Access - - Regional Habitat Planning

Presented above are some of the issues and opportunities that have been identified to date for the South San Diego Bay Unit and Sweetwater Marsh NWR. This list represents only a few of the issues facing these refuge areas. Additional issues and opportunities will undoubtedly be identified as a result of public involvement, as well as input from public agencies and interested organizations. Your comments on these or any other issues will help us develop refuge goals and provide direction for future Refuge management.



**San Diego NWR  
Complex**

South San Diego Bay Unit – San Diego NWR  
Sweetwater Marsh NWR  
1080 Gunpowder Pt. Dr.  
Chula Vista, CA 91910

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US Department  
of the Interior

## **PUBLIC MEETINGS JULY 10 & 11**

See page 1 for locations and times.

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### **Help us keep our mailing list up-to-date and tell a friend.**

If you or someone you know would like to receive future planning updates for this project, please fill in the appropriate information below and return it to us at one of the open house meetings or via mail to the Sweetwater Marsh NWR, 1080 Gunpowder Point Drive, Chula Vista, CA 91910. You will remain on our mailing list unless you request to have your name removed.

- ☐ Please remove my name from your mailing list.
- ☐ Please add my name to your mailing list.
- ☐ The address you have is incorrect. Please change it to the following.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

For questions, additional information or comments, please contact:

Victoria Touchstone, Project Planner  
c/o Sweetwater Marsh NWR, , 1080 Gunpowder Point Drive , Chula Vista, CA 91910  
Phone: (619) 691-1185  
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